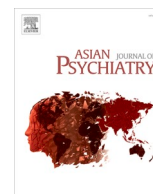




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Letter to the Editor

**Mental health of mental health professionals during COVID-19 pandemic: Who cares for it?***To the Editor,*

At the current moment, the exponential growth in the number of cases and increasing mortality rate worldwide defines the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, people experience enormous mental health challenges, whether they are infected with COVID-19 or not (Tandon, 2020a). The mental health challenges affect different groups of people (general population, COVID-19 patients, elderly, healthcare workers, marginalized population) differently in terms of its nature and severity.

A good number of researches have been conducted over the past few months, globally that measures various aspects of mental health in different groups of the population. It has been seen that the perceived mental healthcare need during this COVID-19 pandemic is high among the general population (Roy et al., 2020).

COVID-19 outbreak produced a serious crisis in healthcare globally, including the mental health sector (Tandon, 2020b). The impact is so intense that the mental health of healthcare workers are affected adversely (Galbraith et al., 2020).

As the number of mental health issues related to COVID-19 is emerging exponentially, it puts the mental health professionals under tremendous pressure. Other than dealing the mental health issues, the mental health professionals are also engaged in additional responsibility like COVID-19 training and duty in isolation wards. As this is a demanding situation, the role of mental health professionals is highly crucial.

Lockdown, closure of essential services (Outpatient consultations) resulted in limiting the access to mental healthcare in majority of the places. Telepsychiatry emerged as an alternative to conventional mental healthcare delivery. Increased number of phone calls and mails for digital consultation had given a new shape to the mental healthcare.

The mental healthcare demand has an upsurge in recent days as:

- The patients with pre-existing mental illnesses report worsening of their symptoms
- General population report stress, anxiety, depression, gaming addiction and burnout
- Marginalized population have compromised mental health
- Healthcare workers are at high need of mental healthcare

As the mental healthcare demand is high during this current COVID-19 pandemic and mental health professionals have to shoulder this responsibility, it is likely to increase their stress and adversely affect their own mental health.

In the current society, people have a common notion that mental health professionals have very strong mental abilities to deal with challenges, so they can't experience stress, fear, anxiety and depression. This belief is even seen among healthcare professionals of non-psychiatric discipline. But, the fact is mental health professionals are

also human beings and are not immune to psychiatric illnesses, frustrations, stress, guilt, fear, anxiety and depression. Mental health professionals also face a similar kind of situation in their family and immediate society.

Society expects the mental health professionals to be patient, caring, strong, motivating, readily available, free from stress and frustrations at the time of need; but simultaneously stigmatizes psychiatry and mental health professionals.

In this situation, the mental health professional's mental health gets grossly ignored. They often fail to seek adequate help for themselves, possibly out of the faulty belief that as experts they should deal with their mental health problems on own. Moreover, a lack of engaging environment and support to those with history of psychiatric illnesses during COVID-19 pandemic makes them more vulnerable. With already high suicide rates, marital disharmony, addiction among the psychiatrists, deterioration of their mental health should be anticipated for timely action (Bergman, 1979; Gerada, 2018).

Mental health is of utmost importance for everybody, including the mental health professionals. Unfortunately, who cares for it?

As a mental health professional, one should care for their mental health first and should not shy away from seeking other's help.

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